Commissioner Smith responds to the Gardner Board

The February 9th FNP opinion pieces by the Gardner Board and Catherine Forrence criticized the current BOCC, but did so with multiple factual errors and misrepresentations. This will correct several of the major misstatements.

Ms. Forrence and the Gardner Board charge that we "repealed" ethics laws, and "eliminated" or "removed" penalties for ethics violations. This is a gross misrepresentation. In November 2011, our Board modified our Ethics and Lobbying Ordinance in order to come into compliance with a new state law. To accomplish this, technically we "repealed" the old law, and then enacted the new law. But the new law continues to contain stiff penalties and fines for their violation.

The previous Board criticizes us for increasing the size of the County Budget and for increasing the burden on taxpayers. Their opinion piece misrepresents us. Our actions have significantly improved the County's financial position WITHOUT INCREASING TAXES. As the Gardner Board acknowledges, most of the budget increases are not really increases at all—the County budget is increased by \$43 million because the cost of fire and rescue services is now included <u>in</u> the County General Fund budget, rather than accounted for separately. The other \$34M in budget increases are primarily for the following: \$18.4M for the BOE; \$9M in long-awaited salary increases for County employees; \$5M one-time payments for CIP and retirement funding; \$1M for stormwater retrofits; and \$0.7M additional funding to FCC

Our Board has substantially strengthened the County's finances. We improved the County bond rating from what we inherited from the Gardner Board. We have reduced the size of government without reducing the level or quality of services. We have taken on from the State approximately \$20 million/year in additional services and payments; and we've done it without raising taxes—except for those few areas in the County that were previously paying little or nothing for fire and rescue services.

The Gardner Board states that taxpayers are spending more on core services like economic development or transit or the department of aging. This is false.

The Gardner Board incorrectly argues that because we eliminated 200 taxes and fees that the taxpayers are now paying \$1.2 mill annually to cover new development. This is not true. This Board not only reduced some fees but also streamlined many permitting procedures that made the permitting process faster and cheaper, and which allowed us to reduce the number of employees needed to do the work. The removal of excessive and unnecessary fees has helped create a thriving business atmosphere in Frederick, which has helped to attract hundreds of new jobs.

The Gardner Board erroneously accuses us of "raiding of general fund revenue" to support the development of Jefferson Tech Park. The Gardner Board first approved the Jefferson Tech Park development. This Board moved it forward when we passed Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for the project, which will impose a special, additional tax on properties in this development, which TIF funds will be used to pay for infrastructure that will be built in the Tech

Park. The TIF pays for infrastructure that the developer will build. It is not correct to say that other county taxpayers will "pick up this tab."

The Gardner Board falsely states that we signed contracts with developers "totally eliminating fees for transportation." Just the opposite is true, through Developer Rights and Responsibilities Agreements (DRRAs) we have secured more funding for road improvements.

The Gardner Board removed from the Comprehensive Plan several key road improvements that are needed to alleviate traffic congestion. Our Board added them back.

The Gardner Board seeks to take credit for bringing 700 jobs to the Urbana area. Well they must also take the blame for the 2,500 jobs lost from the county during their term. (Frederick County Workforce Services tracks this.) And the jobs that did come to Urbana were the result of Tom Natelli's large, mixed-use development in Urbana. The "no-growth" Gardner Board did everything it could to stop development. They even blocked the building of the Homewood senior housing facility on Willow Road, which our Board allowed to go forward. For the Gardner Board to attempt to credit themselves as being a pro-job growth board is disingenuous. Much of the job growth that has occurred in Frederick is in spite of, not because of the Gardner Board. Ask members of the county business and building industries. The Gardner Board shut down growth and sought to destroy land-use plans that were decades old.

Ms. Forrence falsely stated that we sold Citizens/Montevue at a \$20 million loss. The facility was sold at its fair market value, which was approximately \$10 million lower than its cost. But the up-side of this sale is that the County will now extricate itself from operating a venture that was losing \$5 million/year. Such losses amounted to over \$52 million during the last 12 years. It cannot be disputed that the financial aspects of the sale of Citizens/Montevue were a big benefit to the County, which will bolster our already strong, AAA bond rating. At the same time we are moving forward with a better service model for funding county services for senior citizens—one where all needy seniors can receive the same amount of benefits—not just \$35,000/year for each of the 60 who were fortunate enough to obtain a place at Montevue, but nothing for the hundreds of other needy seniors.

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